

Pademelons in Wilsons Promontory National Park

In 2008 I had an article published in *The Victorian Naturalist* that explored the question: Are kangaroos indigenous to Wilsons Promontory National Park? (Whelan 2008). Nearly all available evidence led to the conclusion that they were not but there was one record that indicated kangaroos were present in the early part of the 19th century. This record was an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* (Bird 1926) that recounted a walking expedition undertaken by Fred Bird in 1879. In his account of the expedition, Bird remarked on the presence of kangaroos around the Yanakie Homestead near the current park entrance.

This observation was puzzling, given all other evidence indicated there were no kangaroos on Wilsons Promontory until they were introduced in 1910. In my 2008 article, I provided a number of reasons why this single comment may have been out of context or the product of a failing memory. However, perhaps a more likely reason is that the animals identified by Bird as kangaroos were in fact pademelons.

The Tasmanian (Rufous-bellied) Pademelon *Thylogale billardierii* was apparently very common in coastal scrub, (such as the vegetation on the Yanakie Isthmus) at the time of European settlement; it was probably extinct from the mainland by the early 1900s (Seebeck and Mansergh 1998). They are still common in Tasmania and on some of the Bass Strait islands (Menkhorst 2008). It isn't clear how many animals were present in Victoria but there are estimates of Pademelons in their thousands near Lakes Entrance (Gullan 2010).

There are few historic records of pademelons on the Prom. An unknown number were released between April 1911 and July 1914. It is possible that they came from Flinders Island where they are still common and abundant. (Seebeck and Mansergh 1998). These animals did not establish, presumably succumbing

to foxes and excessive burning. A skull was found in the dunes behind Oberon Bay during a mammal survey in 1971 (Hyett 1971). This could have been washed in from a fisherman's cray pot.

Before native species became familiar to European settlers it was not uncommon for people to use a single name to refer to animals that appeared similar. I understand that even today, in areas where they are still prevalent, pademelons are regularly called kangaroos. There is thus a good chance that Bird was referring to pademelons when he commented on the presence of kangaroos in 1879. If that is the case then this refutes the one and only piece of information that indicates kangaroos may have been indigenous to Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Acknowledgements

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References

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